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SUBJECT: ABDEL AZIZ HELOU ON SPLM DARFUR INITIATIVE AND NCP
OBSTRUCTION OF CPA IMPLEMENTATION

REF: KHARTOUM 571

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: High-ranking SPLM official Abdel Helou Helou told CDA Fernandez that the SPLM is seeking to unite the Darfur rebel factions, because as long as they remain weak and divided, the NCP will be able to avoid serious peace negotiations. He named security as his chief priority in his new post as Deputy Governor of Southern Kordofan, followed by the return of expelled NGOs, education, and roads. END SUMMARY.

"Critical Time" in the Nuba Mountains

¶2. (SBU) On April 27, CDA Fernandez met with Northern SPLM leader and recently-appointed Southern Kordofan state Deputy Governor Abdel Helou Helou. Helou was accompanied by SPLM Southern Kordofan Assessment and Evaluation Commission official Neroun Phillips. The CDA noted that Helou has been "wearing three hats" in the SPLM: elections, Darfur and South Kordofan's Nuba Mountains region. Charge Fernandez said he was glad that Helou will now be concentrating his attention on Southern Kordofan because, while there are others in the SPLM who can work on elections and Darfur, there is no one else to deal with the Nuba Mountains. Helou said that this is a "critical time" to make progress on CPA implementation in the Nuba Mountains, otherwise there could be a return to war. There are only eight months to prepare for credible elections that are a necessary precondition to the popular consultations in Southern Kordofan promised in the CPA.

Darfur: Bringing the Rebel Groups Together

¶3. (SBU) CDA Fernandez asked about Helou's Darfur portfolio. Helou said that the SPLM strategy is to unify the fractured Darfur rebel groups. As long as the factions remain divided and weak, the NCP feels comfortable and confident and will not negotiate seriously. The NCP understands that if it agrees to a power-sharing formula with the rebels, it will lose its mechanical parliamentary majority. That is why in the Doha process they chose to negotiate only with JEM, Helou said. The NCP is only interested in achieving a ceasefire. Once they have that, they will stop participating seriously in further negotiations. The CDA observed that the rebels do not control any territory that would threaten the regime. The only advantage they have is being able to launch attacks and cause trouble. Once they give up that, they lose any leverage they have over the regime. Helou added that the NCP is trying to divide the rebels along tribal lines.

¶4. (SBU) According to Helou, the SPLM has invited seven rebel groups, including JEM and SLM-Abdul Wahid, to confer in Juba on May 5 and seek a common position. Helou said he had met with the stubborn and confused SLM leader Abdul Wahid Al Nur in Paris for six hours (Abdul Wahid refused to accept the presence of SPLM official Yasser Arman in the room). In the end, Abdul Wahid reluctantly

agreed to send an SLM delegation to Juba, although he would not attend himself. Asked whether the NCP is aware of the Juba conference, Helou said that the NCP knows and approves of the gathering.

Nuba Mountains: Security is Foremost Concern

15. (SBU) Turning to his new position as Deputy Governor of South Kordofan, Helou said he would be departing soon to take up his post. He noted there are many problems, security foremost among them. Phillips stated that the NCP is creating these security problems by arming the Arab tribes like the Misseriya and Hawazma that migrate annually through the Nuba Mountains. The heavily armed tribesmen clash with local farmers over access to water. Phillips argued that the problem is "worse" in Nuba than elsewhere, because there are more clashes and more deaths. Phillips added that while the Southern Kordofan state authorities could take proactive measures to avert problems, but instead they wait for conflicts to break out, then they react. The Charge commented that there had been plans for conflict mediation to be carried out by some of the NGOs that have since been expelled by the Khartoum government.

16. (SBU) CDA said he had heard that people in the Nuba Mountains were outspoken when they met with the joint UN-GOS mission to assess humanitarian needs following the GoS order expelling INGOs after the indictment of President Bashir by the International Criminal Court. Phillips stated that the Nuba Mountains receive no services from the state government, only from the NGOs. Helou ticked off a list of unfulfilled NCP commitments under the CPA: Popular Defense Force militias have not disbanded or disarmed as promised, nor has DDR started. (Note: A UN small pilot DDR program is scheduled to kick off in Southern Kordofan soon, but this program does not include

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disarmament of militias. End note.) He also charged that the SAF has not reduced its forces in the region. The CDA noted that the NCP accuses the SPLA of not having withdrawn its forces from the Nuba Mountains, south of the 1956 border. Phillips denied there are SPLA fighters in the Nuba Mountains. He said that the SPLA has withdrawn south of the border to Lake Abyad. CDA asked whether it still is true that the SPLA soldiers at Lake Abyad lack basic services. Phillips agreed that this continues to be a major problem, especially the lack of potable water.

17. (SBU) Helou said he had met already with Southern Kordofan's NCP-appointed Governor and it is clear that he is not serious about tackling these issues. Rather than take real action, the Governor said will appoint an advisor on security issues.

Returning Expelled NGOs

18. (SBU) Helou said the second critical issue is the return of the NGOs that were expelled. The Charge noted that Presidential Special Envoy Gration pressed Khartoum to allow the return of the NGOs. Most likely, the NGO programs that are now operating in the Nuba Mountains would return but as different organizations, thus allowing the NCP not to have to admit it had made a mistake in expelling the NGOs.

NCP and Umma No Different

19. (SBU) Asked who he thinks will be the SPLM's chief rival in Southern Kordofan in next year's elections, Helou said that he expects it to be the Umma Party. The NCP, the Sudan National Party, and the Democratic Unionist Party also will compete, he said. "There is no difference between Umma and the NCP," he said, when asked about the potential for an SPLM-Umma coalition in the state. Both represent the same Arab, tribal, and religious interests, said Helou.

Education, Roads, and IDP Returns

110. (SBU) Helou urged that the U.S. assist with education in the Nuba Mountains region. Helou said he would like help in sustaining the three institutes to train local teachers established by the SPLM during the war years. He also said there are an adequate number of

primary schools, but there are no secondary schools. CDA noted that the U.S. had been working on a plan to assist the three areas, but that this has been set back by the order to expel USAID's NGO partners. He said he would ask USAID to look at education in the Nuba Mountains again.

¶11. (SBU) Helou and Phillips said that the Nuba Mountains badly need roads. CDA noted that roads are a USAID priority and that an assessment team has traveled to the Nuba Mountains. Work on the road connecting Kadugli and Kauda is planned, paid for with Multi-Donor Trust Fund money. Phillips said there also is a need for a road connecting Kauda and Rahad (which sits on the Obeid-Khartoum highway), so that the Nuba Mountains region could link into markets in the North.

¶12. (SBU) Finally, Helou raised the issue of Nuban IDPs in the North who wish to return to their home region. He said there are currently 100,000 Nuban IDPs (including 65,000 in Khartoum) who would like to return to their homes before elections and requested assistance finding funds to allow this to happen. Helou noted that the GOSS returns program has thus far refused to fund returns to the Nuba Mountains. (Comment: It is true that the GOSS has focused heavily on returns to areas south of the 1-1-56 border, and it was clear from our discussion that Helou would like to encourage returns to his home area before voter registration occurs to increase his chances of winning an election. End comment.)

Comment

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¶13. (SBU) The Nuba Mountains continues to be one of the most sensitive flashpoints along the north-south border. Until now, the SPLM there has lacked effective leadership and peace dividends for the people have suffered as a result. In Kadugli, Helou will have to contend with an uncooperative, NCP-controlled state government. Helou will be a big improvement over his ill and alcoholic predecessor Daniel Koti, but he will have his work cut out for him. Post strongly supports the proposal for additional schools as well as the construction of a road between Kauda and Rahad if funds can be identified for these costly projects. This would be one of the most important ways of showing a peace dividend to the region, as well as showing a tangible benefit to being part of the North.

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FERNANDEZ